Volume 12, Issue 12 Atari Online News, Etc. March 19, 2010

Published and Copyright (c) 1999 - 2010
All Rights Reserved

Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

To subscribe to A-ONE, change e-mail addresses, or unsubscribe,
log on to our website at: www.atarinews.org
and click on "Subscriptions".
OR subscribe to A-ONE by sending a message to: dpj@atarinews.org
and your address will be added to the distribution list.
To unsubscribe from A-ONE, send the following: Unsubscribe A-ONE
Please make sure that you include the same address that you used to
subscribe from.

To download A-ONE, set your browser bookmarks to one of the
following sites:

http://people.delphiforums.com/dpj/a-one.htm
Now available:
http://www.atarinews.org

Visit the Atari Advantage Forum on Delphi!
http://forums.delphiforums.com/atari/

=~=~=~=

A-ONE #1212 03/19/10

~ China Without Google?! ~ People Are Talking! ~ Commodore 64 Awakes!
~ Innovation on Display! ~ Google Leaving China! ~ Pay for Online News?
~ Can IE9 Get Mojo Back? ~ Teen Internet Addicts! ~ 'Dot-Com' Turns 25!

~ National Broadband Fee? ~ Congrats to Mahlerts!! ~ Nintendo DS Invasion?

-* Cybersecurity Bill Introduced *-
-* Texan Accused of Web-Disabling Cars *-
-* Parents Oppose Philly Webcam Spying Suit! *-

=~=~=~=

->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""

What a week it's been!! Over the past month or more, while many areas well south and west of us continued to get buried under feet of snow, we were left relative untouched. For those of us in New England, this was a rare occurrence, but we didn't mind seeing others being on the snowy receiving end for a change. But, as Mother Nature is wont to do, there is usually an eventual balance.

This past weekend, our area was covered with 6-10 inches of rain. Dams strained, and rivers overflowed their banks, flooding many areas under inches and feet of water. In my neighborhood, we weren't really directly affected other than a few who had basements flooded. Due to a flooded main street because of feet of water covering a bridge, I couldn't even take my normal route to work. I had to take a long and convoluted path all around town to get to work from the other direction. During that drive, I was able to view some of the carnage that resulted from one of the two rivers that go through my town. It wasn't a pretty site.

So, I see myself as very fortunate that I didn't have to clear tons of snow during February. And I'm also fortunate that this recent deluge of rains did little but add a lot of moisture to my yard.

It's all over but the cleaning-up and drying-out for many. The weather has been summer-like the past few days; and I've been out enjoying it. Okay, so I've also been cleaning up some debris left from a dismal winter, but that's an annual seasonal occurrence. It's nice to be outside enjoying the warmth and sunshine. I hope that this kind of weather continues!

So, hopefully most of you had an uneventful winter and past few weeks of drastic weather conditions. If not, I hope things improve for you soon. Meanwhile, sit back and relax, and let's enjoy this week's issue!

Until next time...

=~=~=~=

PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone, and there is, again, very little from the NewsGroup to talk about, so I thought I'd take this opportunity to interject a few of my thoughts about this and that.

First of all, A-ONE would like to give a big ol' shout-out and hearty congratulations to our friend Rob Mahlert and his wife Berta on the arrival of their daughter Linneah Rose. From what we hear, Mommy, Daddy and baby are all doing well, if somewhat sleep-deprived. Hang in there, Rob. It'll only last for the next, ohhhhh, 18 or 20 years! [grin]

Okay, now that the joyful stuff is out there, I need to tell you something very sad. Frank Naumann, maintainer of SpareMiNT, has passed away. I don't have any details yet, and maybe we'll have something more before 'press time', but for now all I know is that he passed on March 12. Frank has been a cornerstone in the Atari community for more than a decade now, and I know he will be sorely missed. Our condolences go to his close friends and family. If I have the correct information, he was only 34 years old. That is FAR too young to have been taken from us.

Okay, now that I've given you good and bad... let's get down to the nitty-gritty, shall we? Oh, c'mon, you knew this was coming. Health care.

Let's face it, folks, we need to do something about paying for health care. I've said it before and I'll probably say it many many times again: Our HEALTH CARE is fine... it's the best in the world. What we need to figure out is how to PAY FOR IT. What we really need is health care INSURANCE reform.

C'mon, is there any real reason that health care insurance should cost what it does today? I mean, in my case, health care insurance is costing just under $145 a week. Yes, a WEEK! And I'm a fairly healthy individual with no long-term medical issues.

But let's take a second and do that math. I don't recall what the national minimum wage is, but the minimum wage here in Connecticut is $8.50/hour. So a full-time job of 40 hours will get you $340.00 a week gross (yeah, big whoop, right?). I'm going to guess (and it's only a rough guess) that taxes and such will take out about 15%, which makes 'take-home' pay about $290.

Now, if you have to pay $145 a week for health insurance, that leaves you with an actual take-home pay of $145 a week, and also reduces your 'effective hourly wage' to $4.87 an hour (that's your pay before taxes but after health care insurance payments), and means, for all intents and purposes, that $3.62 of your hourly rate goes directly to health care.

Now surely there's something wrong there, and that's not even taking into account that under some 'versions' of health care reform you HAVE to have insurance... and I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing. I think everyone SHOULD have health insurance, just like everyone pays taxes that go to pay for schools, fire departments, road crews, etc., regardless of whether they have kids, have ever had a fire or have ever used the highway. In many states, you MUST have auto insurance to drive a car. Massachusetts has done basically the same thing with health care insurance. While many think this is an adequate solution, I do not. By mandating health care Massachusetts has simply assured the insurance companies of tens of thousands of 'extra' customers to over-charge.

What we really need... and I know many of you will groan at this... is a ’public option’. If you’re going to MAKE people get insurance, you had better also make sure it’s something they can afford and actually has some value to it other than just ’covering their butts’ in the face of the new law.

We cannot... should not... simply hand almost 30 million ’conscripted customers’ to the insurance companies without first making sure that they’ll be treated fairly and not taken advantage of just because they HAVE to have insurance.

Perhaps the biggest problem throughout this whole process has come from (and I can’t believe I have to say this) the White House itself. For far too many months the President and his staff tried to play the peacemakers... trying to get "the other side" to come around. Now, I have no experience in national politics, but once it became clear that the other side wasn’t going to listen no matter what, it should have been time to say, "Okay, if you won’t participate, then just get the hell out of the way. You lost the majority, sit your butts down for the next term and stay the heck out of the way".

And when it comes to the ’legislative tricks’ that everyone’s complaining about, well there’s something just plain wrong about using a ’trick’ on something this important. But when you come right down to it, ’deem and pass’ isn’t really a trick, but a procedural process. The ’other side’ would have you believe that this is the basest, most horrendous miscarriage of justice that’s ever been seen. They will, of course, forget to mention the ’antic’ they’ve pulled over the past three decades or so... the filibusters, the deem and pass, the midnight quickie votes after whatever bill it was had only been available for hours (the major reason that this bill must now be available for 72 hours before a vote can take place), and the ever-popular ’nuclear option’.

And the really sad part is that while we DO need to do something about health care, there are some people who don’t seem to care about that, but only about "winning"... or at least "not loosing". There’s too much at stake here to play these little games, whether you believe that something needs to be done or not.

Well, anyway, the vote is supposed to come up this week, and while it’s not the bill that anyone really wanted, its a start, and maybe now we can get on to some of the other issues plaguing us... unemployment, the economy, corporate bail-outs, two wars that are costing us bunches of money, and a score of other things that we really should be looking hard and long at, but haven’t been able to because of the contentious nature of the health care debate. Maybe now we’ll get to talk about some of the two or three dozen legislators who have voted against the [queue dramatic music, please] stimulus package but yet fought to have codicils added that benefit their districts. How can you be against a bill because it’s wasteful and yet pack it with your own pork? It just doesn’t make sense. But that’s politics, I guess.

I wish I had some more uplifting stuff for you this week, and the birth of Rob’s daughter is surely good news! I wonder if she has any idea of how many ready-made aunts and uncles she’s got lined up already. [grin]

Well, that’s it for this week, kids. Tune in again next time, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

=~=~=~=

->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Innovation on Display at Games Conference!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" The Great Nintendo DS School Invasion!

=~=~=~=

->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Innovation on Display at Games Conference

Motion controls and social gaming were the hot topics at this week’s Game Developers Conference, the annual convention of game designers, programmers and executives.

Sony shook up the conference with a splashy introduction of the PlayStation Move, a new wand-shaped PlayStation 3 motion controller system that will rival Nintendo’s popular Wii.

Sony showed off several games that use the new system, which utilizes a PlayStation Eye camera to detect players’ movements. Among them were the action brawler "Motion Fighter," over-the-top party game "TV Superstars," athletic simulator "Sports Champions," mini-game collection "Move Party," third-person shooter "SOCOM 4" and wacky downhill racer "Slider."

"It’s just scratching the surface," said TechSavvy technology analyst Scott Steinberg. "If you talk with game developers themselves, they will tell you they don’t know what they’re quite capable of doing because they’re just coming to grips - no pun intended - with the hardware itself. At this point, we’re just seeing some very early possibilities."

The biggest buzz, however, seemed reserved for social gaming, a form of easy-to-play online multiplayer games. With the success of such social games as the real-time crop-growing simulator "FarmVille" and the gangster role-playing saga "Mafia Wars," several conference sessions this year were devoted solely on how to tap into the gaming world’s Next Big Thing.

"I feel like people are motivated more this year," said Game Developers Conference director Meggan Scavio. "They seem genuinely excited to be doing what they’re doing, and there’s an air of anticipation. I think they’ve discovered there’s still new business models out there. There’s still new ways to develop and make games that they hadn’t thought of before."

There’s still wow factor, too. On the sprawling expo floor, attendees gawked at the VirtuSphere, a huge hamster ball-like virtual reality doodad that allows users inside to control a virtual character by walking around inside it. Folks also crowded in front of a mock living room populated with hipsters rocking out with the upcoming guitar game "Power Gig."

"Civilization" and "Railroad Tycoon" designer Sid Meier delivered a keynote address to hundreds of attendees Friday morning about the psychology of game design, encouraging gamemakers to suspend players’ disbelief without taking them out of the interactive experience. Meier told the audience that they can "save millions" just by tapping into gamers’ imaginations.

"What it comes down to is we’re trying to create this epic journey for the player where the process of playing a game takes you from one place to another," Meier later said. "By the end of the game, you’ve maybe learned something about the world and hopefully something about yourself. That’s what we’re really trying to do with the psychology of making a game."

The Great Nintendo DS School Invasion

Could Nintendo’s Mario and Luigi be headed for blackboards and pop-top desks after decades battling bob-ombs, chain chomps, hammer bros, and koopa troopas? Mario creator and Nintendo R&D guru Shigeru Miyamoto certainly hopes so.

Speaking to The Associate Press ahead of today’s London-based British Academy Video Games Awards, where he’ll receive a special award, Miyamoto admitted turning consoles into teaching tools is "maybe the area where I am devoting myself (the) most."

Miyamoto can lay claim to some of video gaming’s greatest franchises. Donkey Kong. Mario Bros. Zelda. Kid Icarus. F-Zero. Pilotwings. Wave Race. Star Fox. Pikmin. Metroid Prime. If you’re one of the over 30 million Wii owners in the US, you also know him for recent hits like Super Mario Galaxy, Super Smash Bros. Brawl, Mario Kart Wii, and New Super Mario Bros.

Add education-related gaming to his resume, if he has his druthers, courtesy the Nintendo DS. Miyamoto says he wants to convert Nintendo’s bestselling portable gaming device into an educational aid, and pronto. The DS is already used in Japanese public venues like museums and aquariums, he says, adding that Nintendo will begin rolling out the DS in Japanese junior high and elementary schools in the coming school year.

It’ll be interesting to see where any of this goes, stateside. Video games theorist and Georgia Tech professor Ian Bogost just typed up an op-ed decrying the lack of substantive connectors between government-endorsed gaming and the actual merits of said games. Nintendo isn’t the US government, but - rose-tinted love-glasses for Miyamoto and all he is and represents snatched off for a moment - it’s certainly just as susceptible to government influence.

After all, it’s already happened in the UK.

=~=~=~=

A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Cybersecurity Bill Introduced in Senate

A new version of a cybersecurity bill was introduced in the Senate on Tuesday that may eliminate some opposition to the measure from the tech industry.

The bill would give the president a Senate-confirmed national security advisor to lead "all cybersecurity matters," whether in defense or civilian areas, according to a summary of the bill.

Cybersecurity touches just about every aspect of the United States, from military espionage and potential cyber sabotage of U.S. infrastructure to cyber bank thefts and loss of intellectual property.

The new draft put out by Senators John Rockefeller and Olympia Snowe reflects consultation with industry groups and some changes to lessen tech industry opposition, said James Lewis, a technology expert with the think-tank Center for Strategic and International Studies.

The bill, which has gone through several drafts, had been stiffly opposed because, among other things, it allowed the president to shut down the Internet if needed for national security. It also required certification of cyber professionals.

One major change to the bill is that the president would no longer have the power to shut down the Internet unilaterally but would have to work with industry to draw up plans in the event of a national emergency.

"They’ve said they’ll call industry. They’ve bent over backwards to make people feel better about that," said Lewis.

One hot button issue that remains is a requirement that cybersecurity professionals be certified, something the tech industry had fought.

Among the new provisions, the bill would require a process to determine which portions of the U.S. economy really are critical infrastructure, and give key private sector officials security clearances so they would have access to classified threat information, according to the bill’s summary.

A mark-up of the measure has been set for next week.

China Without Google: ’A Lose-Lose Scenario’

China without Google - a prospect that looks increasingly likely - could mean no more maps on mobile phones. A free music service that has helped to fight piracy might be in jeopardy. China’s fledgling Web outfits would face less pressure to improve, eroding their ability to one day compete abroad.

The extent of a possible Google Inc. pullout from China in its dispute with the communist government over censorship and hacking is unclear. But on top of a local search site that Google says it may close, services that might be affected range from advertising support for Chinese companies to online entertainment.

"If Google leaves, it’s a lose-lose scenario, instead of Google loses and others gain," said Edward Yu, president of Analysys International, a Beijing research firm.

Chinese news reports say Google is on the verge of shutting its China site, Google.cn, and has stopped censoring results. A Google spokesman, Scott Rubin, denied censorship had stopped and would not confirm whether Google.cn might close.

"We have not changed our operations in China," Rubin said by phone from Google’s headquarters in Mountain View, California. CEO Eric Schmidt said last week something would happen soon, and Rubin said he had no further details.

Google says it is in talks with Beijing following its Jan. 12 announcement that it no longer wants to comply with Beijing’s extensive Web controls. But China’s industry minister insisted Friday the company must obey Chinese law, which appears to leave few options other than closing Google.cn, which has about 35 percent of China’s search market.

Such a step could have repercussions for major Chinese companies as well as local Web surfers. It would deliver a windfall to local rival Baidu Inc., China’s major search engine, with 60 percent of the market. But other companies rely on Google for search, maps and other services and might be forced to find alternatives.

China Mobile Ltd., the world’s biggest phone company by subscribers, with 527 million accounts, uses Google for mobile search and maps. Baidu offers mobile search but China Mobile passed up a partnership with it earlier after they failed to agree on terms, according to industry analysts. Millions of mobile customers might lose access to Google’s Chinese-language map service.

A key issue is whether Beijing, angry and embarrassed by Google’s public defiance, would allow the company to continue running other operations, including advertising and a fledgling mobile phone businesses in China if Google.cn closes.

China promotes Internet use for business and education but bars access to sites run by human rights and political activists and some news outlets. Officials who defend China’s controls by pointing to countries that bar content such as child pornography are stung that Google has drawn attention to how much more pervasive Chinese limits are.

Chinese Web surfers are blocked from seeing Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and major blog-hosting services abroad and a Google pullout would leave them increasingly isolated.

Google hopes to keep operating its Beijing research and development center, advertising sales offices and mobile phone business, according to a person familiar with the company’s thinking. But the person said the company won’t do that if it believes its decision to stop censoring search results will jeopardize employees in China. Industry analysts estimate Google has a work force of 700 in China.

The government says Chinese mobile phone carriers will be allowed to use Google’s Android operating system but there has been no word on whether efforts to sell its own phones in China might be affected. Google postponed the launch of two phones with a major Chinese carrier due to the dispute.

Uncertainty also surrounds Google’s China music portal, a free, advertising-supported service launched last year in partnership with four global music companies and 14 independent labels. Industry analysts say it has helped to undercut China’s rampant music piracy by offering an alternative to unlicensed copying.

"Without that, are we back to, ‘Piracy wins’?" said Duncan Clark, managing director of BDA China Ltd., a technology market research firm. "Piracy thrives because of censorship."

The music service is run by Top100.cn, a company part-owned by Google, but can be accessed only through Google.cn. Top100.cn’s executive chairman, Erik Zhang, said it is preparing for the possibility that Google.cn might close but said his company has not been told whether that will happen. He declined to give other details.

The biggest impact of a Google departure could lie behind the scenes, where Chinese companies, many of them small entrepreneurs, rely on its AdWords advertising service, Gmail e-mail and documents services.

Those might be disrupted if Beijing turns up Internet filters to block access to Google’s sites abroad. Its U.S. site has a Chinese-language search engine but is already inaccessible due to government filters.

In an uncomfortable irony for Beijing, Google might suffer little commercial loss from a pullout while China’s own companies are hurt.

The bulk of Google’s estimated $300 million in 2009 revenues in China came from export-oriented companies that would need to keep advertising on its sites abroad even if Google.cn closes, according to Yu.

"We believe the majority of revenue would still be kept on, with keyword purchases listed on Google.com instead of Google.cn," he said.

The loss of competitive pressure from Google also might slow Chinese development in search and other Internet services, Yu said.

"This is definitely a bad thing for Chinese companies that want to go abroad in the future," he said.

The industry minister, Li Yizhong, said Friday that China’s Internet industry would develop without Google. But even some Chinese industry leaders who normally toe the government line in public are warning that controls on Internet companies and media are handicapping their growth.

Beijing has steadily tightened controls over Internet content and

foreign investment in the industry. Video sharing sites must have state-owned media outlets as partners. People in the industry say it is getting harder to register privately financed sites.

"Without full and fair market competition, there will be no quality, no excellence, no employment opportunities, no stability and no real rise of China," said the chairman of major Chinese portal Sohu Inc., Charles Zhang, in a speech in February, according to a report on Sohu’s Web site.

"How do we do this practically?" Zhang said. "The problem is complicated, but the fundamental point is to limit the power of the government."

Google To Leave China April 10

US Internet giant Google will close its business in China next month and may announce its plans in the coming days, Chinese media reported on Friday, after rows over censorship and hacking.

The China Business News quoted an official with an unidentified Chinese advertising agency as saying Google would go through with its threatened withdrawal on April 10, but that Google had yet to confirm the pull-out.

The agency is a business partner of Google, the report said.

The report did not specify whether Google would close all or part of its operations in the country.

The newspaper quoted an unidentified Google staff member as saying the company may announce on Monday the details of its exit from China and compensation for its local staff.

Google China spokeswoman Marsha Wang declined to comment on the report, telling AFP only that there had been "no update" on the company’s situation.

The report was the latest in a series of clues to emerge recently indicating Google planned to leave China, which has the world’s largest population of online users, at 384 million.

Google has cried foul over what it said were cyberattacks aimed at its source code and the Gmail accounts of Chinese human rights activists.

The Financial Times reported last week that Google was "99.9 percent" certain to abandon google.cn, citing an unnamed source.

Chinese media said Wednesday that Google sent a notice to clients saying google.cn could close at the end of March.

The issue has sparked a simmering war of words between China and the administration of US President Barack Obama, which has called on Beijing to allow an unfettered Internet.

The dispute has exacerbated mounting tensions between the two over a range of trade and diplomatic issues.

Beijing tightly controls online content in a vast system dubbed the

"Great Firewall of China", removing information it deems harmful such as pornography and violent content, but also politically sensitive material.

Google has continued to filter google.cn results to abide by Chinese censorship demands, but says it will eventually stop the screening.

Google confirmed earlier this week that it had received a letter purportedly from a group of 27 Chinese advertising agencies calling for the US company to open talks on compensation for possible business losses if it leaves China.

However, representatives of several of the firms subsequently told AFP they knew nothing of the letter and Chinese media reports have raised doubts about its authenticity.

Google’s Wang told AFP the company is still "reviewing" the letter.

Parents Oppose Philly School Webcam Spying Lawsuit

Some suburban Philadelphia parents are seeking to halt a potential class-action lawsuit accusing their school district of using cameras in school-issued laptops to spy on students at home.

Three sets of parents of students at Lower Merion and Harriton high schools filed documents in federal court Thursday asking for permission to intervene in the case.

The family of 15-year-old Harriton High School student Blake Robbins is seeking class-action status for a lawsuit accusing the Lower Merion School District of photographing him in his bedroom. The district has said it activated the cameras only to locate missing laptops.

Parents who object to the lawsuit say they are angry about the webcams but are concerned about the financial impact of a class-action settlement. Nearly 500 district parents have signed a petition opposing the class-action suit.

"We see no benefit to the school district or to the students if a large damage award is gained by the plaintiffs," said Larry Silver, one of several attorneys for the anti-lawsuit group. He also has a child in the wealthy school district on Philadelphia’s Main Line.

"We want a positive resolution to this matter," he said. "We want them to get back to their educational mission."

In their complaint submitted in U.S. District Court in Philadelphia, they requested hiring an independent public advocate, permanently banning laptop webcam use by the district and implementing new regulations on the proper use of technologies.

The district remotely activated 42 webcams over 14 months, successfully locating 18 missing computers. School officials have declined to describe the resulting photographs, and the district has halted the practice amid the lawsuit and resulting state and federal criminal probes.

In the civil suit filed in February, Robbins said a school official approached him and warned that, based on webcam photos, he was suspected

of selling drugs. Robbins denies the allegation.

Mark Haltzmann, attorney for Robbins, did not immediately return a call seeking comment. He has 14 days to respond to the parents' complaint.

Commodore 64 Awakes From Slumber With Makeover

The vintage Commodore 64 personal computer is getting a makeover, with a new design and some of the latest computing technologies, as the brand gets primed for a comeback.

The Commodore 64 was a home computer running on an 8-bit processor released by Commodore International in 1982. The computer was one of the most popular models of all time, selling close to 17 million units between 1982 and 1994, according to the Computer History Museum.

The revamped computer will be available through the Commodore USA online store, which is set to open June 1, according to the company's Web site. The computer will be an all-in-one keyboard, with Intel's 64-bit quad-core microprocessors and 3D graphics capabilities, according to the site.

To conform with the times, the PC also offers up to 500GB of hard drive storage and 4GB of RAM. Also included are a DVD-RW drive, a touchpad, four USB ports, a Gigabit Ethernet port and a DVI (Digital Visual Interface) port to connect monitors. No price information was given on the Web site.

Commodore USA is a new company that has licensed the Commodore name from Commodore Gaming, which makes games for PCs and consoles. The PC company is trying to invoke the glory of the Commodore 64's past to promote the new PC. On its Web site, the company shows an image of the old Commodore 64 with the caption "you loved us then," and then an image of the new PC, with the caption "you'll love us again."

The device is small, measuring 17.5 inches (0.44 meters) wide and 2 inches (0.05 meters) tall, Commodore said. "It's designed to take up far less room - and use far less energy - than any other desktop computer," Commodore USA said. The PC will run the Linux, Windows and Mac OS X operating systems.

But will it find buyers? The glorious past of Commodore PCs might not be repeated for its successor, said Roger Kay, president of Endpoint Technologies Associates.

"It's a weird legacy thing with modern inerts," Kay said. Commodore PCs had a heavy following in the 1980s among hobbyists, but the glory days may not translate to better sales with price-conscious customers today, Kay said.

Commodore started selling Commodore 64 in 1982 for US$599 and managed to reduce the price to $199 over time, a revolutionary price then, said Jack Tramiel, former chairman of Commodore International, during a panel discussion in late 2007.

During the same panel, Apple co-founders Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs approached Commodore with an Apple II prototype, which was much more advanced in color, graphics, sound and games. Apple at the time didn't have the money to make and sell the Apple II, and was hoping Commodore

would push the design to market. Commodore, however, preferred to develop the Commodore 64 as a simpler, lower-cost, black-and-white-only machine.

Commodore wanted to serve the "masses," not the "classes," Tramiel said during the discussion. Commodore kept updating the original Commodore 64 design and became the first to sell more than a million PCs, but the company filed for bankruptcy in 1994 and liquidated its assets. In the meanwhile, Apple managed to survive, and the Apple II became one of the most recognized computers in the 1980s.

Commodore computers were made for enthusiasts and came with fairly arcane software and hardware elements, Kay said. Kay bypassed a Commodore and bought an Apple II in the early 1980s, as it had software that made the computer easier to use.

"It wasn’t so easy [to use a Commodore], the way Apple always understood the experience should be," Kay said. That made the Apple II computer better for new users entering the computer market.

Can Internet Explorer 9 Get Microsoft’s Mojo Back?

With improved speed and support for HTML 5, Internet Explorer 9 could be Microsoft’s next step toward restoring its old mojo.

Microsoft hasn’t shown very much of its next Web browser, and hasn’t announced a release date. The most you can do is preview some of Internet Explorer 9’s capabilities, which say nothing about the browser’s user interface. Still, what Microsoft has shown so far is enough to get people excited.

Previous versions of Internet Explorer have lagged behind other browsers on speed and support for new technology - the problems that Microsoft is working on with IE9. While Microsoft used to insist that Javascript speed wasn’t that important, it’s now using benchmarks to show that it can go toe-to-toe with any browser. Support for HTML 5, which is still not a standard, hardware-accelerated 3D graphics show that Microsoft is thinking ahead on performance.

What we don’t know about yet are user interface and security. Even if Microsoft overhauled neither, Internet Explorer 9 would still be in pretty good shape. IE8 got creative with accelerators and Web slices. It also caught up with the competition on features like drag-and-drop tabs and private browsing. With the addition of other security features, a test by NSS Labs, albeit sponsored by Microsoft, found that Internet Explorer 8 was the safest browser.

But users of Chrome and Firefox are likely to say that something just feels faster about their browsers, and for good reason: PCWorld’s speed tests from last summer put Chrome ahead of the pack, and Firefox in front of Internet Explorer. With IE9, Microsoft’s at least showing a willingness to join the horse race.

Of course, Microsoft still has a wide lead in the browser wars. In the most recent market share estimates from NetApplications, Internet Explorer has 61.2 percent, compared to 24.2 percent for its closest competitor, Firefox. However, IE’s share slides every month, and the browser now faces tougher

competition from Google Chrome.

It’s possible that Microsoft will be powerless to bring back defecting users. There may be something about the look and feel of Internet Explorer, or its standing as the most common target for security attacks, that drives people away. But at least Microsoft’s tackling the issues that have held its browser back from greatness.

Do You Want to Pay a ’National Broadband Fee’?

The recently released national broadband plan has grand ideas for hooking people up to high-speed Internet. But the plan also crafts a solution to a problem officials have been trying to solve since 2001 - interoperable communications.

On the other hand, the plan also floats the idea of a "national broadband fee," paid for by taxpayers.

The plan, which the Federal Communications Commission presented to Congress this week, calls on the government to use the power of broadband to improve public safety. Specifically, that includes the creation of a nationwide interoperable public safety wireless broadband communication networks by 2020.

"The country must do better," the FCC wrote. "With broadband, 911 call centers - could receive text, pictures, and videos from the public and relay them to first responders, [and] the government could use broadband networks to disseminate vital information to the public during emergencies in multiple formats and languages."

In the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, state and local fire and police officials responded to the call for help, but their equipment was not interoperable, causing communication problems. Police could not warn fire department officials about falling debris. Port Authority police could not tell state police to get out of a building, and so on.

The creation of a truly interoperable system has been talked about in Washington ever since, but nearly nine years later, no such thing exists.

The FCC’s plan takes a three-pronged approach, the first of which calls on the FCC to open up some spectrum so networks don’t become jammed during an emergency.

The January 2008, 700-MHz spectrum plan set aside the D-block for public safety use, but it failed to attract a bidder willing to pay the $1.3 billion reserve price. The FCC report suggests not focusing solely on the D-block, but engaging in partnerships with commercial operators for public safety use of wireless spectrum more broadly. Basically, if there’s an emergency, first responders get to hop on available networks - not just those in the D-block - and are given first priority if that network is at capacity. However, the plan also doesn’t explain how that would happen.

That would be funded by federal grants, the FCC said.

The plan also calls for the creation of an Emergency Response Interoperability Center (ERIC). Housed within the FCC, ERIC would ensure

that all these apps, devices, and networks work together.

"Focusing on interoperability from the beginning should help the public safety broadband network to overcome the difficulties faced by other earlier voice efforts," the report said.

All these suggestions are useless without money, though. While a majority of the recommendations made in the 376-page FCC report are "budget-neutral" because they would ideally be funded by spectrum auctions and private investment, the public safety section is one of several that would require Congress to okay funding.

The FCC estimates that the interoperable network would require as much as $6.5 billion over 10 years, with most of that money needed between the second and fifth year. The costs associated with keeping these efforts going and sustainable, however, could be between $12 billion and $16 billion. Congress should allocate this money no later than FY2012, the report said.

Another way to get those funds? Add a surcharge to broadband service. "Imposing a minimal public safety fee on all U.S. broadband users would be a fair, sustainable and reasonable funding mechanism. The fee should be sufficient to support the operation and evolution of the public safety broadband network," the FCC said.

The FCC would also need an additional $6.9 million and $1.9 million every year thereafter to continue the FCC’s Project Roll Call, which keeps tabs on the operational status of wireless and broadcast communications.

The public safety section of the report also touches on cyber-security. It calls on the FCC to: deliver a cyber-security roadmap to Congress within 180 days; require broadband and VoIP providers to report all outages; and create a cyber-security information reporting system with the Department of Homeland Security, among other things.

Finally, the plan includes proposals for next-generation 911 systems, which will incorporate broadband into the 911 system. The plan recommends that Congress tell the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration to issue a report on costs, which will be used to develop of a federal regulatory framework for NG911 deployment.

"The plan’s recommendations for advancing public safety and homeland security draw upon an extensive record and incorporate input from the public safety community, service providers, vendors and countless others," Jamie Barnett, chief of the FCC’s public safety and homeland security bureau, said in a blog post. "We truly appreciate the efforts of all who contributed to development of these recommendations, which we believe will revolutionize public safety communications and emergency response."

UPDATE: FCC spokesman Rob Kenny said Thursday that any fee assessed for the public safety network would be nominal and less than $1 per month, per user.

"The public safety fee would be tens of cents per wireless user per month (certainly less than $1 dollar)," he said via e-mail. "This is still being reviewed and no definitive range or figure has been estimated. We will continue to review this."

"We are confident that the recommendations in the National Broadband Plan provide a framework to ensure that there is a nationwide interoperable wireless broadband network for America's first responders. It is vitally important that we create a broadband network for public safety that enables them to respond to emergencies rapidly and cohesively," Kenny concluded.

Will You Pay for Online News? Pew Study Says No

The average U.S. consumer loves to read news online, but only one in five is willing to pay for it. And if your favorite news site suddenly erects a pay wall that requires subscription or pay-per-article fees, more than four of five of you would simply get your news elsewhere.

Those sobering statistics - bad news, certainly, for newspaper and magazine publishers intent on charging readers for online content - is from a new Pew Internet Project study that examines consumer attitudes toward online media. The report confirms what mainstream media outlets have feared for years, even if many won't admit it: Getting online readers to pay for mainstream news will be hard - really hard - and no one has a clue how to go about it.

The Pew findings don't bode well for upcoming pay wall plans by The New York Times and other newspapers. The /Times/, for instance, announced in January that it would implement a hybrid free/fee system for its website. Beginning in January 2011, readers will be able to view a certain number of free articles each month, but they'll have to pay a flat fee for full access to the site. The /Times/ also is developing a fee-based offering for the upcoming Apple iPad tablet.

The Internet has become a stellar medium for news delivery. According to Pew, six of ten Americans read some online news every day. Problem is, most news publishers can't profit from the new medium, despite 15 years of trying.

And if publishers' Internet operations are profitable, their revenues aren't enough to support the extensive (and expensive) news gathering operations that were possible under the dying, print-advertising business model.

There are exceptions, of course, most notably News Corp.'s Wall Street Journal, which has succeeded in convincing readers to ante up for online news. Subscribers pay $79 per year to access the Journal's websites, and News Corp. chief Rupert Murdoch has announced plans to add pay walls to the media giant's other news sites. But, as Pew reports, Murdoch has "yet to take any action on the matter."

Like the Journal, other pay wall success stories are niche publications (like Consumer Reports) or databases that offer specialized information not available elsewhere. These publications are quite different from a general-interest newspaper, which usually includes national and international news available from a wide variety of online sources.

In the pre-Internet days, your local newspaper had a monopoly on print versions of syndicated content. (And even in a two-newspaper town, the competition was minimal.) Today, wire copy from AP, Reuters, and other syndicators is ubiquitous online. Classfieds? You used to need the local

paper to find a job or sell a car. Today, Craigslist owns the classified market.

So aside from local news, what does your city’s paper have to offer? What can it charge for an online subscription, and what are readers willing to pay?

For consumers to pay up, news organizations will have to offer "content that is unique, and this may require specialization and investment by news organizations," Pew reports.

In other words, they’ll have to get creative - and fast. It remains to be seen whether the ink-stained wretches are up to the task.

Texan Accused of Disabling 100 Cars over Internet

A man fired from a Texas auto dealership used an Internet service to remotely disable ignitions and set off car horns of more than 100 vehicles sold at his old workplace, police said Wednesday.

Austin police arrested Omar Ramos-Lopez, 20, on Wednesday, charging him with felony breach of computer security.

Ramos-Lopez used a former colleague’s password to deactivate starters and set off car horns, police said. Several car owners said they had to call tow trucks and were left stranded at work or home.

"He caused these customers, now victims, to miss work," Austin police spokeswoman Veneza Aguinaga said. "They didn’t get paid. They had to get tow trucks. They didn’t know what was going on with their vehicles."

Ramos-Lopez was in the Travis County Jail on Wednesday with bond set at $3,000. The Associated Press could not find a working phone number for his family.

The Texas Auto Center dealership in Austin installs GPS devices that can prevent cars from starting. The system is used to repossess cars when buyers are overdue on payments, said Jeremy Norton, a controller at the dealership where Ramos-Lopez worked. Car horns can be activated when repo agents go to collect vehicles and believe the owners are hiding them.

"We are taking extra measures to make sure this never happens again," Norton said.

Starting in mid-February, dealership employees noticed unusual changes to their business records. Someone was going into the system and changing customers’ names, such as having dead rapper Tupac Shakur buying a 2009 vehicle, Norton said.

Soon, customers began calling saying their cars wouldn’t start, or that their horns were going off incessantly, forcing them to disengage the battery. Norton said the dealership originally thought the cars had mechanical problems.

Then employees noticed someone had ordered $130,000 in parts and equipment from the company that makes the GPS devices.

Police said they were able to trace the sabotage to Ramos-Lopez’s computer, leading to his arrest.

Norton said Ramos-Lopez didn’t seem unusually upset about being fired.

"I think he thought what he was doing was a harmless prank," Norton said. "He didn’t see the ramifications of it."

’Dot Com’ Domain Celebrates 25th Birthday

Monday marks the 25th anniversary of the .com domain, according to VeriSign.

On March 15, 1985, Symbolics.com was the first domain to register via a ".com" address. Though it took another decade for .com to really catch on, there are now 80 million .com Web sites, including 11.9 million e-commerce and online business sites, 1.8 million sports-related sites, and 4.3 million entertainment Web sites.

The most popular words to use in domain names are home (1.2 million), online (1 million), and land (891,000), VeriSign said.

"For anyone under the age of 30, they probably don’t remember when the Internet wasn’t in their life. It’s become such an essential part of how we work, live and play," Mark McLaughlin, chief executive and president of VeriSign, said in a statement. "The 25th anniversary of .com gives us a moment to step back and realize how deeply the Internet revolution has transformed our society."

Last year, Symbolics.com was sold to Missouri-based investment company XF.com, and Symbolics.com currently serves as a blog for XF.com, which also operates domains like copier.com, copies.com, march.com, HY.com, and iBlog.com.

As part of the anniversary, VeriSign is launching Project Apollo, an effort designed to strengthen and scale the .com infrastructure by the year 2020. That involves scaling and revamping the infrastructure in order to grow .com capacity to handle 4 quadrillion queries each day by 2020 - up from 4 trillion today.

"Over the last 15 years, there have been numerous predictions of the Internet’s imminent collapse. But the Internet infrastructure has withstood not only a dramatic increase in both users and usage, but malicious attacks because of the investment and efforts to continually scale it," Ken Silva, VeriSign’s chief technical officer, said in a statement. "With the technology roadmap outlined in Project Apollo, we are building the infrastructure essential to manage the Internet’s next wave of growth as increasing demands put stress on the system and drive a dramatic increase in traffic."

The .com domain brings in $400 billion each year in economic activity, according to a report from the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation (ITIF). That number is expected to grow to $950 billion by 2020.

VeriSign will host a Policy Impact Forum in Washington, D.C. Tuesday as part of the 25th anniversary celebration, during which former President

Bill Clinton will deliver the opening keynote.

VeriSign has also launched a Web site, 25yearsof.com, to highlight some of the .com achievements from the past 25 years.

London Hospital To Treat Internet-Addicted Teens

Teenagers who cannot tear themselves away from the Internet, computer games or their mobile phone can get help from a new addiction service, a spokeswoman said Thursday.

A private London hospital has launched Britain’s first dedicated technology addiction service for what it dubbed "screenagers", after parents complained their children were flying into a rage when told to turn off their computer.

Help will be offered through intensive in-patient, day care or group therapy to children as young as 12, although it is aimed at 15 to 17-year-olds, amid increasing concern about the amount of time they spend in front of a screen.

"I’ve been contacted by parents who see their children going into a rage when they’re told to turn off their computer," Richard Graham, lead consultant at Capio Nightingale Hospital, told the London Evening Standard.

"Some end up having to call the police."

He said children played some computer games for the social contact, adding: "It gives them a sense of connection so they end up playing all the time."

Teens will be encouraged to switch off technology and interact with people face-to-face rather than online, a hospital spokeswoman said, and also helped with any problems caused by their habits, including cyber-bullying.

She cited research showing that adults who spent too much time online suffered physically and mentally, while young people became agitated and had difficulty concentrating, and ultimately could become depressed.

"Mental health services need to adapt quickly to the changing worlds that young people inhabit, and understand just how seriously their lives can be impaired by unregulated time online, on-screen or in-game," Graham said.

In a statement, he said he hoped the service "will address the underlying causes of this addiction to transform screenagers back into teenagers".

=~=~=~=

Atari Online News, Etc. is a weekly publication covering the entire Atari community. Reprint permission is granted, unless otherwise noted at the beginning of any article, to Atari user groups and not for profit publications only under the following terms: articles must remain unedited and include the issue number and author at the top of each article reprinted. Other reprints granted upon approval of request. Send requests to: dpj@atarinews.org

No issue of Atari Online News, Etc. may be included on any commercial media, nor uploaded or transmitted to any commercial online service or internet site, in whole or in part, by any agent or means, without the expressed consent or permission from the Publisher or Editor of Atari Online News, Etc.

Opinions presented herein are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the staff, or of the publishers. All material herein is believed to be accurate at the time of publishing.